

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF DECEMBER 19, 2024 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci and Sarah Widing

NRWA: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold

NPS: Emma Lord

DEC: Neil Angus

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. The meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

The minutes of the November 21, 2024 meeting were approved as amended.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed a 1-page Summary of Council's finances under its first NPS Cooperative Agreement (CA1) through November 30, 2024. While funds provided by CA1 must essentially be spent by April 30, 2025, we also have funds available to spend under our second NPS Cooperative Agreement (CA2) to spend during this current fiscal year. Wynne then reviewed the status of CA1 funds as follows:

- **Total Contractual:** Contractual funds disbursed in November covered payments of \$5,483 for two completed community grants; Wynne noted that one of the completed grants was returning \$533 in unspent funds. With \$71,000 being held as committed funds for current community grants and projects, the balance of contractual funds to expend by April 30, 2025 is just over \$23,000.
- **NRWA Program Support:** There is nearly \$23,000 in committed staff support for various projects, as well as travel, which is resulting in a \$15,400 deficit. However, the staff time estimated for these projects may not all be used and, if need be, we could request transfer of unspent Contractual Funds (up to 10%) to Staff Support in the current CA1 budget or draw on funds from CA2 for Staff Support.

Wynne, Emma Lord, and Lucy will meet in January and bring a recommendation to the Council at its January meeting as to the best use of the remaining CA1 funds and if appropriate, use of CA2 funds. Lucy added that we will also need to begin drafting our work plan and budget for FY26 and may have an opportunity then to consider changes in allocation of funds between Contractual activities and NRWA Program Support.

NPS

Emma reported that the funds for the first year of CA2 (our FY26) are "in-house" with the NPS and so secure. That said, it will be up to Congress to continue to fund each of the subsequent four years of the term of CA2.

Update on Current Projects

Jr Ranger River Book: The small working group (Stacey Chilcoat, Diane Carson, Beth Suedmeyer, Emma, Wynne, and Lucy) will be meeting in person in early January to share ideas on format and content of this booklet. Beth has received copies of Blackstone River booklets, noting one focused on pollinators.

Culvert Assessment & Mapping: Wynne reported that this project is going well, adding that Marisa Browning-Kamins is now fully certified to lead assessments and data reporting. The team has been focusing on southern New Hampshire, and, to date, have assessed 30 sites. They hope to complete this project by the end of April and have a report to share with public officials, particularly DPW superintendents. Wynne added that it has come to their attention that NRWA's staff leading this project (Utkir Adkhamov and Marisa) can be trained and certified on NH's culvert assessment protocol, which is more sophisticated than the North Atlantic Connectivity Collaborative protocol currently being used. This additional training would enable our team to input and provide data to the state which meets New Hampshire's standards. The cost for Utkir and Marisa doing this additional training would be \$1,400. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously passed, the Council approved adding another \$1,400 to the \$9,000 set aside for this project.

Interpretive Signage: Wynne reported that the order has been placed to produce the signs and she expects delivery in early January. Given the discussion on the Jr Ranger River Book, it occurred to Wynne that the Council might want to buy full rights to the illustration Kelly Finan had done for the signage project. Having the full rights would enable us to use the illustration (or a portion of it) on the books we produce, as well as in other ways to promote our work. She believes it would cost \$6,700 to purchase the full rights, but will check the contract we have with Kelly. Drew Kellner wondered if this would be worth the expense; Lucy noted that we have discussed installing more signage at public access points along the rivers so owning the rights would pay for themselves in just a few signs. It was agreed that this is worth considering; Wynne will contact Kelly and provide an update at our next meeting.

Potential Projects

Regional Invasives Species Management: Beth reported that the small working group had met and has set up a meeting with Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) to learn about their partnership invasives management program, SuAsCo CISMA. Both Berndette and Paula Terrasi acknowledged that managing invasives (both aquatic and terrestrial) is a challenge for small towns with limited resources. Heidi Ricci added that she believes that Pat Huckery's suggestion of a regional management approach would be the most effective way to address a potential multi-year effort. Beth added that the Council might be the most cost-effective way to administer such a program, as opposed to each town or land trust looking for financial support through community grants. Lucy suggested we consider adding this as a dedicated activity (similar to the Community Grants program) in our FY26 budget and work plan discussions. Emma noted that work on the budget and work plan should begin in February.

Community and Land Protection Grants

Groton 2023 Trail Signage: Lucy reported that the Groton Trails Committee has asked for an extension to March 31, 2025 to enable completion of the signs. Delays in approvals from various state agencies on location, accessibility, etc. have slowed production of the signs. Final approval of the text by DCR is expected in January, which will enable the grantee to proceed to graphics review and design. Once approved, the goal is to move into final design and production by March 31st. On a motion made, seconded, and voted, the Council unanimously approved the extension request.

Completing Open Grants: Lucy shared a spreadsheet developed by NRWA's bookkeeper that tracks the status of funding for Community and Land Protection Grants, noting that there are a few grants from 2021, 2022, and 2023 that have not been completed and, therefore, have not received the remaining grant funds due them. In addition, most of the 2024 Community Grants are still active. She would like the representatives for the towns with the open grants to reach out to the grantees to let them know they need to complete their projects and receive their final payments by April 30th. It was suggested Lucy write the grantees and then the town representatives would follow up. Lucy will try to email a letter in early January and will let the representatives know when it has been sent.

2025 Community Grants: The RFP, Grant Application, and Grant Agreement were reviewed and approved with some minor edits. The RFP will be posted in early January with applications due March 3, 2025. The Land Protection Grants RFP, Application, and Agreement will be considered in January. It was suggested we consider changing it to a rolling grant application, as needs for due diligence can arise at any time. Lucy noted that the SuAsCo River Stewardship Council had tried it and found tracking the grants with the appropriate fiscal year a challenge; instead, she suggested, we consider offering these grants twice during the year.

Forest Legacy Project

Lucy reported that progress continues. One more tract is nearly ready to close and two more are ready to submit for the Yellow Book appraisal (the definitive valuation of the property) and should then be ready to close. Other tracts are moving more slowly as there have been scheduling problems with the title examiners and surveyors.

Updates and Announcements

Friends of Wetlands and Woodlands: Beth reported that this Friends Group, which provides support to a couple of the US Fish & Wildlife Service's refuges, including the Oxbow NWR, could use some support from the Council. It was agreed we should reach out to Grace Bottitta-Williamson, the Refuge Manager and Paula Goodwin, Program Coordinator, to learn more about how we could help and let them know about our work. Lucy noted that Grace is on our distribution list and gets copies of our agendas.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, January 16, 2024 at 7 PM by Zoom